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October 20, 2011

Hon. Dan Kotowski, Chairman
Budgeting For Results Commission
Senate District Office
350 S. Northwest Hwy., Suite 300
Park Ridge, IL 60068

Re: **Submission of Safer Foundation – Net Fiscal Savings attained through
Investment in IDOC Re-entry programs for ex-offenders – the Results**

Dear Chairman Kotowski:

On behalf of the Safer Foundation, I would like to take this opportunity to provide you and your fellow Commissioners with a concise and accurate overview of how the State's investment in reentry programs for ex-offenders has had a documented cost savings to the Illinois Department of Corrections operational budget. Simply stated, an examination of the track record on material reductions in recidivism following access to such services leads to one inescapable conclusion: if the General Assembly seeks to reduce the cost of incarceration from its IDOC operational budget, fully funding, if not expanding proven contractual reentry programs will continue to succeed in meeting that result.

Safer Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that provides community-based services to individuals with criminal records. Its mission is to reduce recidivism by supporting, through a full spectrum of services, the efforts of people with criminal records to become employed, law-abiding members of the community.

The question is – what would be the direct implications of reducing reentry services in this recessionary period? The answer, borne out by irrefutable recidivism data, is clear and simple. Failure to provide the appropriate level of funding for re-entry services would mean exponential growth in the IDOC operations budget, that is, the State will actually experience an increase in the prison population because a large number of individuals who do not receive reentry services, such as employment, will promptly commit new crimes and return to our Illinois prisons. Dr. Dave Olson of Loyola University, stated that 66% of those rearrested after release in 2007 were arrested within one year of release; 26% of them within the first two months of release. Widely available reentry services could have made a difference.

Lack of employment opportunity and the resulting economic instability leave individuals who have paid their debt to society feeling angry, marginalized, and

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vulnerable. A society that denies an opportunity for a second chance to its members – whatever the pretext – is a society in the process of destroying itself.

Research points to the value of employment to improve outcomes. At a cost of more than \$24,000 annually to incarcerate one person, recidivism reduction represents taxpayer savings. According to a recidivism study conducted by Loyola University, only 20% of Safer clients recidivate after retaining employment for 30 days. **This represents a 62% reduction in the recidivism rate – nearly 52% of all adults released from Illinois prisons during that period return within three years.** That is real and significant savings to IDOC operations and in turn, our state budget.

Most tax-paying citizens would agree that persons who have served time in prison have “paid their debt,” and now they should “pay their way/taxes.” Balancing the State’s budget is imperative, but a short-term solution like cutting cost-effective programs – will have a negative impact and actually yield an increase in the costs of incarceration. On the other hand, the smart, long-term solution – to fully fund reentry programs and services – will have positive implications for the State – help reduce recidivism, add to the tax base, and strengthen the overall community. In my opening statement I asked you to fully fund several reentry programs and here is the work that must be done.

Safer provides contractual services under agreement with IDOC for two adult transition centers (ATCs), **Crossroads and North Lawndale**. Both ATCs house and transition more than 1,300 incarcerated individuals each year from Illinois prisons to the community in a secure environment. The treatment services facilitate the change from offender to employed, law-abiding members of the community

Cost Efficiencies: The cost to incarcerate individuals in traditional adult correctional facilities is staggering. According to a 2004 U.S. Department of Justice Statistical Report, total annual operating costs and capital expenditures per prisoner under the authority of the State of Illinois on 06/30/2001 were \$45,629. There is much to be said about effective, efficient alternatives like ATCs, especially those run by Safer Foundation. For example, based on the most recent available data from the Illinois Department of Correction’s website, the average daily per capita costs for the IDOC-operated Westside ATC (excluding capital construction costs) is \$122.53.

In comparison, the average daily per capita cost for Safer-operated Crossroads ATC is \$57.21 including all general and administrative costs, as well as capital, program, and treatment costs. ***This equates to an annual cost savings to the state general revenue fund of \$4.4 million based on capacity.*** It is also important to note that individuals get far more programs and services for the money at Safer than what is provided in

state facilities because Safer uses other resources such as federal and private dollars to fund its work which includes basic skills and GED classes, as well as job readiness and placement work.

Safer provides contractual services under agreement with IDOC for the **Sheridan and Southwestern Job Preparedness and Placement Programs**. Since 2004, Safer has provided the nationally recognized pre-employment job training inside the correctional centers and employment placement and retention services as the participants return to their communities. In FY 2010, close to 500 job opportunities were provided to the Sheridan Program participants with an average wage rate of nearly \$10.00 per hour.

Safer also provides contractual services under agreement with IDOC (currently supported by federal funds) for the **Halfway Back Program**. Safer and *A Safe Haven* are partnering with IDOC to provide an intervention for technical parole violators who would otherwise be re-incarcerated. It is an employment-centered modified therapeutic community that utilizes employment readiness methodologies

Based on 39 years of assisting individuals with criminal records secure employment, Safer offers a unique focus and expertise in addressing reentry needs of the formerly incarcerated. Some of Safer's activities that support cost-effective, successful reentry and thereby contribute to a decrease in recidivism, increase in tax savings, and an increase in public safety for Illinois residents include:

- Providing over 2,700 job opportunities to people with criminal records in FY 2010.
- Offering GED classes where over 300 eligible students earned GEDs last year.
- Increasing literacy proficiency level by an average of two grades for almost 400 individuals.
- Securing federal dollars each year to support the work done with Illinois parolees.
- Generating positive outcomes, for example: evaluations of the Sheridan's program first three years show that those completing the program had the lowest conviction rate among parolees in state history.

In FY 2010, Safer provided services to about 10,000 people with criminal records and the number continues to rise dramatically. Based on the magnitude of the need and the consequence to public safety for not addressing it, Safer works to develop cost-effective, high impact solutions and workforce development models that meet the unique needs of its clients. When a person with a criminal record is able to rebuild his or her life through employment and education, the impact goes well beyond that individual. The family becomes stronger and healthier, and the community is stronger and safer. Effective reentry programs and policies benefit us all. Access to jobs for people with criminal records isn't just about giving a second chance to those people; it's also an important investment in our state's future.

Chairman and Representatives of this esteemed Commission, we urge you to support and approve full funding for reentry. These initiatives serve the formerly incarcerated population, while strengthening families and communities and provide employers with a qualified workforce; all while significantly improving tax-payers' return on the state's investment of corrections dollars. Without them there are real risks:

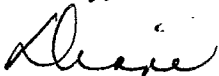
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unsuccessful transition from prison (revolving door syndrome); communities and human services providers being forced to bear the burden of managing unemployed persons with records; and consequences to public safety.

We recognize the importance of balancing the state's budget during these extremely difficult economic times, but believe that fiscally responsible solutions that yield positive outcomes and ultimately save tax dollars must be employed, that is, providing evidence-based interventions such as effective reentry programs and alternatives to incarceration. As noted, success can be seen in Safer's results.

If you or your staff members have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



B. Diane Willaims
President/CEO

cc: Budgeting For Results Commission Members
Cristal Thomas, Deputy Governor,
John Kamis, Senior Advisor to the Governor.